Curriculum Is Power

Author’s Note: While the following description may be more romantic than real, the writing of it was a kind of antidote to the frustration caused by reading and hearing statements describing curriculum in terms of the finite dimensions of a shaped behavior, a prescribed or mediated message, or a package and a basal text.—LJB

- Curriculum is not the teacher’s guide or the textbook. It is not reshuffling old ideas or shaping ancient dust. Nor is it claiming memories from musty rituals of yesterday; nor searching out the tired traditional bins.

- Curriculum is not a placid pond into whose depths we cast an artifact or fragment and watch the widening ripples gently spend themselves into oblivion.

- Curriculum is, instead, a waterfall with power and flow; it is a plunging, moving process that cannot be stopped, although you can channel it, and you can harness it.

- The rush of curriculum in any given situation admits only a quick historical review, as when we scan a photo or a sketch. Unless, of course, we choose to look upstream. Upstream means youth and their propensities, larger learnings and social imperatives, each individual and his unique perceptions. These in concert must be studied as an entity with thrust and consequence.

- This curriculum power moves through schools and their communities. Each learner, patron, or professional is captured by its mainstream, or slowly drifts within its shoreline eddies. A learning society is filled with its volume; a rigid society restricts its flow; a stagnant society rejects its great potential.

- To reshape curriculum demands review of the before and after, and a recognition that each change is causal and significant. Such change involves at minimum a willingness to wade into the shallows, or better yet to be immersed within its depth.

- Our time demands real changes, with a deep regard for all this power and continuity.

—Leslee J. Bishop, Professor, Department of Curriculum and Supervision, University of Georgia, Athens.